“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” — Catherine of Siena

What a powerful quote. Instinctively we feel motivated. But then we pause and ask ourselves, “Who did God mean me to be” and “how could I, a simple housewife in Raleigh, set the world on fire?”

Let’s divide this talk into two parts starting with “Be who God meant you to be”. This is a loaded sentence and people spend years trying to “find themselves”. But, as Catholics, we are blessed, because Jesus gives us guidance to figure this out through the Catholic Church.

Know in your hearts that God has a dream, a plan especially for you. He wants good things for you, many times better than for what you want for yourself. In 1Corinthians 2:9 Paul teaches us, “No eye has seen, no ear heard, not the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” God knew you before He created you, you were created in His image, and He wants you to have a full and abundant life by being the best that you can be, that is, the person that God meant for you to be. This striving to be your best is also known as the Call to Holiness. And why should we respond to this call to holiness? Because God wants us to be saints in heaven with Him! This is goal of Christian life-holiness. Don’t believe the stereotype that Holiness is boring, limits freedom, and it is only for saints. On the contrary, authentic holiness brings abundantly full lives, true freedom, and remember, saints were people just like us.

So how will we live out this call? Well, it differs with each person, changes depending on our state of life-single college girl, married mom, widow, etc. and reflects our own God given gifts and talents. Think about Mother Theresa’s response to God’s call and St. Edith Stein. Did they take the same path to sainthood? No. My prayer is that each one of you will discover, in your vocation as mothers and wives, your personal journey using your gifts and talents to be who you are meant to be and set the world on fire.

So now we know that God is calling us to holiness, that is, being who God meant us to be. How do we do this? Well, it all starts out with choices, both little and big. Think about the result of the choice of waking up just 15 minutes earlier than the kids to say a prayer, to discover what God has in store for you and then begin your day, readying yourself for when they awake. As many of you know, it can be the difference between peace and chaos. And the days you don’t get up those few minutes earlier you end up wanting to kick yourself. Every choice matters. Little choices can build upon each other and define who we are. Think of the mantra of “Just have that piece of cake/margarita/double mocha latte-you deserve it!” And although we probably do deserve it, gluttony will never satisfy us. But if we succumb to this gluttony daily, this choice will eventually catch up, prohibiting us from answering God’s call to Holiness and being who we are meant to be.

Sometimes as moms, especially when we are going through transitions like from one kid to two, or kids starting school, we feel like we have lost our bearings and we risk making
choices out of fear or frustration. When this happens, stay anchored in Christ. If we feel as if life isn’t making sense, it maybe that we have lost sight of God’s plan for us. Does that mean that when you are frustrated with your 2 year old that you were really meant to be a career woman? No, maybe it means God is asking you to make the choice to put the phone down, leave the dishes and just sit down and play. In choosing to say yes to the duty of the moment, we will have calm, peace and clarity to our life, reducing your fear and frustration. Trust in God, as He knows what we need and though prayer, we can hear him and make the right choices to do his will.

Holiness starts out with one simple choice, a desire to do one holy thing, one moment at a time, doing the ordinary in an extraordinary way showing Christian love in all our interactions, everywhere - at home, work, in our suffering and as parents and spouses. Seek God in all your choices. Invite Him to the center of your decision. Regrets are born of wrong choices. If you start making good choices, little and big, your lives will be transformed forever.

Now, for better or for worse, God gave us Free Will. To guide us in this gift of free will is reason (the capacity for logical, rational and analytical thought) as well as conscience (the inner voice that encourages you to do good and avoid evil. God speaks to us through our conscience.) Please note that our conscience is an informed one, formed by knowledge that comes from our Catholic Church, founded by Jesus Christ. Reason and conscious work together to distinguish good from bad actions and help you live the best life, to be who God meant you to be.

Because God loves us so much, He didn’t create us and say, “Good luck on Earth, hope to see you back here with me when the time comes!” No. He gave us Wisdom, that is, truth lived, in the Bible (10 Commandments-see handout). God also gave us the Church, which teaches us the virtues (see handout). When you have time, please read the handout as we will not go into detail here. Also, please go to our webpage under the faith formation tab and read the summary of our Virtues talk, November 2015. Before we move on, I want to touch briefly on the virtue of Hope in Christ. This means that we know that Christ is already victorious, trust in Him, His plan and desire eternity with Him. Developing this virtue will make all the difference between living your life with intention and purpose and floating through life unmoored. Beware of the secular modification of this virtue which is positive thinking or optimism. Although those may be components of Hope in Christ, they are an inadequate substitute because they are dependent on the self, void of God’s grace.

So now we understand that God has a dream for us, He wants us to be who we are meant to be, making good choices daily guided by the wisdom of the Catholic Church. Jesus said, “I have come so that you may have life, and have it to the fullest.” John 10;10. So what is stopping us? Why do we resist? Even when we know something is wrong, we desire it and often do it, over and over again. How many times have we said, “This is the last time I stay
up late to read just one more chapter of chick lit” or “The last time I watch just one more Friends rerun that I’ve seen 3 times already” knowing I will suffer the consequences of to little sleep? You get the idea.

We resist because of our fallen nature, the disordered desires within every human person. St. Paul wrote: “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” There are many reasons we resist the call to holiness both internal and external. One is our own personal resistance manifested in some sort of vice-our pride, laziness, envy, etc. Let’s try to identify it, beg God to root it out, practice the corresponding virtue and get God’s grace through the sacraments, especially Confession and Eucharist. (see handout).

Then, we have external philosophies or ways of thinking that seem so commonplace, that they have become the norm. If we buy into it, it will thwart our mission to be who God means us to be. Let’s identify the 4 most common ones. By identifying them, we can be on the lookout to see how some of these ideas might have crept into our way of thinking, stopping us from fully answering God’s call to holiness. Many of these ideas will be revisited in various ways throughout this year’s presentations so we won’t go into too much detail here.

The first is individualism. The belief is “What about me” and is a philosophy of selfishness. The rotten fruits are greed, selfishness, isolation and exploitation. Christian individualism is quite different. It is a personal relationship with Jesus, allowing Him to work through each one of us in a unique and individual way in service to Him and others. The fruits of this is love, caring, kindness to neighbor.

Another philosophy is hedonism which believes that pleasure is the ultimate goal in life-if it feels good, do it! The fruits are laziness, gluttony, procrastination and lust. On this one I will take a moment to expand. Many people proudly happiness as their number 1 goal. Now, God placed within us the desire for happiness, and He wants to help us find true happiness which comes through holiness. A Happiness that is a result of right living. For example, honesty, caring and patience lead to happiness, whereas dishonesty, selfishness and impatience leads to misery. Our Church teaches us about happiness in the CCC#27: “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”

The world, however, is selling us a poor substitute for happiness, called pleasure. This search for pleasure is a distraction. Although pleasure can be good and beautiful and God wants us to experience pleasure on this Earth, it is not happiness. The difference? Pleasure cannot be sustained beyond the activity producing it. For example, eating good food produces pleasure. When we stop eating the pleasure stops. So we keep eating...Another example I see is among married couples. We have been sold a Hollywood fantasy of how a romance should be which has been propped up books and magazines marketed toward
girls and women. So we set off on a quest for “happiness” in our relationships when in reality we are seeking the unsustainable emotion that comes from moments of pleasure that is confused with true joy and happiness. Don’t settle for an empty life of unsustainable pleasure. Choose more-choose the lasting joy of happiness.

Minimalism is a belief where one seeks to exert the minimum effort and receive the maximum reward. It is the enemy of excellence and the father of mediocrity. Contrast this to the Christian philosophy which believes that all of our work, whether as moms or in a job or career, is a prayer to God, striving to do our best, seeing it as a form of sanctification and pruning to get into the narrow gates of heaven. Work is a beautiful opportunity to grow in holiness with money, although necessary, being a secondary goal.

Relativism is that there is no absolute truth. However, it immediately contradicts itself in its “absolute” claim that there is no “absolute truth”. The fruits of relativism are disorientation, intellectual and spiritual confusion and hopelessness caused by the loss of meaning in life. As Catholics we believe in the absolute Truth as told by Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and in the teachings of the Catholic Church. This is our anchor, our foundation built on good solid ground which will not easily become unmoored. Armed with this knowledge we can go forth into this world, secure in our faith, to evangelize to others, inviting them to know Jesus Christ, or if God wills it, face persecution.

Are any of these philosophies products of great thoughts? Although parts of these philosophies may be convenient to our disordered desires and selfishness at a particular moment, they do not provide a philosophy that we can live by or sustain a community for any length of time. Reject the world’s vision for your life and embrace the Truth, Beauty and Goodness of God and our Catholic faith. That is what our soul is thirsty for.

Now, I’m going to ask you to be a rebel. Reject the world’s vision for your life as it leads to emptiness and embrace and celebrate God’s vision for your life because it leads to joy and fullness, now and forever. Our Catholic history is full of great saints who rejected the culture’s vision for their life. What about you? Will you decide to walk with God on this path to holiness, allowing him to lead you, making touch choices that others will brand you as crazy?

Think about those three simple words that Jesus tells us several times, “Be not afraid.”

At this point, hopefully we know that God has a plan for each one of us, we have tools to make good choices using our reason and intellect, have ways of identifying what is holding us back and will try to root out, with God’s grace, any of the negative philosophies that have crept into our lives.

Now let’s talk about how we can set the world on fire. What does that mean? It means we were made for holiness and for mission, that is, service. When we look around, in our
families, communities and the world, we see a big mess. We see poverty, hatred, violence, greed, pollution and more. Remember, this is because we live in a fallen world where there is sin. But this is the beauty of Catholicism. God is calling us to more, inviting us to be Christ’s hands on earth, to bring His love to our spouse, children, family and all who we interact with, in little ways and big. He wishes to raise us up out of this fallen world through the vehicle of the Catholic Church, inviting us to live an abundant life of service to God and our neighbor.

Perhaps we may feel a big urge or a little nudge from God but may resist responding to it. It can be scary and daunting and we may say to ourselves, “Oh no, not me, a Raleigh wife and mom just making it through the day? You’ve got to be kidding.” But Jesus tells us several times, “Be Not Afraid.” He gives us all the tools to have spiritual courage like prayer, mass, confession Adoration, devotions, study.

But how do we know what mission God is calling us to? Ask Him and prayerfully listen! Still sounds daunting? Here are some helpful tips.

First, remember that God created you to have an intentional life. Remember, no mission is too big or too small. Marriage is a sacrament of service. Our goal as a married couple is to get each other to heaven. That alone is an extremely noble mission. God may be asking that of you today-to pray for your husband that he understands and undertakes his responsibility as spiritual head of the family, leading the souls of you and your children to heaven and protecting the family from evil. Pray to Saint Monica and never give up hope.

Honestly analyze your talents and abilities. Whereas we all share universal talents such as the ability to make a difference in the lives of others, only some of us have unique amazing talents such as painting like Monet. Don’t be concerned with the obsession the world has with unique talents. Those talents are a gift from God and they are good when used in service to Him. But be aware - The world says that “You can do whatever you set your mind to” or “if only you work hard enough” or....But that is a lie. No matter how hard Mother Theresa would have practiced basketball, she never would have made the Olympic team. Albert Einstein wrote, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it to be stupid.” One quick note-try not to ever feel jealous of anyone’s gifts or talents. Their gifts or talents are for their mission. Your gifts and talents are for your mission. If you try to do their mission, yours will be left undone. Not only does it cause your heart to be restless, but it is a great tragedy.

Also ask yourself, What are you passionate about? What do you feel called to do? Pray about it, listen to God, be 100% available to God and you will see the answer to how you will fulfill your unique mission and set the world on fire. And with it, you will discover an indescribable joy and a deep peace.
Now I can’t tell you what your mission is, but I can share two things that will help you discover it. And when you find it, you will know it. First, although you may not know the details of your unique mission, the general one is the same for all of us—to make the love of God known to the world. In your own place and time, you are here to bring the love of God to everyone in your path. And secondly, do the next right thing; make the next right choice. Strive for holiness to live the incredible life God created just for you.

Throughout this year, MIF will embark on this journey together, of learning, studying, praying and partying side by side. My prayer for us this year is that we experience the love of God in ways so powerful, we cannot resist embracing Him with our whole heart, mind and soul. I pray that we can begin this ongoing transformation towards “Being who God meant us to be”. I pray that we experience this incredible joy that comes from saying yes to God and placing Jesus at our center. I pray that we are astounded by the beauty and genius that is our Catholic faith. And I pray, that we live an abundant life of mission and service here on earth, becoming saints in heaven for eternity.

“It is Jesus you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.

“It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.”

Address at World Youth Day, Rome, August 19th, 2000

The Ten Commandments are

1. Believe in God.
2. Do not worship anyone or anything except God; do not make, bow to, or worship an image or statue that is supposed to be God.
3. Do not take God’s name in vain.
4. Observe Sabbath, that means, rest on the seventh day.
5. Honor your parents.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not testify as a false witness.
10. Do not be jealous of anything someone else has.

THE CARDINAL VIRTUES
The Cardinal Virtues are four moral virtues that are the foundation for the others virtues and can be attained through practice.

**Prudence:** Prudence is basically the ability to distinguish what is good and bad in any given situation, and to take appropriate action. For instance, if you are in a big hurry on the freeway, and you know that you are in an area closely monitored by the police for speeding, it would not be prudent to go faster than the speed limit.

**Justice:** Justice is the virtue that demands that we give everyone exactly what is due them. For instance, if the cashier gives you too much change back at the counter after a purchase, justice says that you must give back the extra money, if you know about it.

**Fortitude:** Another word for fortitude is courage. In the Christian sense, fortitude is the virtue that allows us to overcome our fears and continue in our Christian tasks.

**Temperance:** Temperance is concerned with the restraint and moderation of our desires for food, sex, pleasure, and drink. (i.e. do not be a slave to drink, etc.) Where prudence dictates our actions based on externals, temperance dictates our actions based on internals.

**THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES**

The 3 Theological Virtues can only be acquired as a free gift from God. God pours these virtues into our very being through sanctifying grace, which is obtained through the seven sacraments. They are also called supernatural virtues. They are as follows:

**Faith:** The theological virtue that is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” our firm belief in God and all that He has revealed to us through Holy Mother Church. Faith manifests itself in how we handle our day-to-day lives, how we treat others, and in our Catholic devotions.

**Hope:** The theological virtue that allows us to totally trust in Jesus and to desire eternal bliss in heaven with him, forever.

**Love/Charity:** - The theological virtue of love for God over all other things for His sake, and our love of neighbor as ourselves. St. Paul tells us that love is the greatest of the three theological virtues.

7 Capital Virtues

**The seven contrary or capital virtues are as follows:**

**Humility** – The virtue of humility is about modest behavior, selflessness and the giving of respect. Counters sin of pride

**Generosity** – Generosity is a willingness to give, freely and without request for commendation. Counters sin of greed.

**Chastity** – Chastity is moral wholesomeness and purity, and in both thought and action treats God’s gift of sexuality with due reverence and respect. Counters sin of lust.
Meekness – Meekness, or patience, focuses on patiently seeking appropriate resolution to conflicts, and on the ability to forgive and show mercy. Counters the sin of unjust anger, also called wrath or rage.

Temperance – The virtue of temperance or abstinence is centered on self-control and moderation. Counters the sin of gluttony.

Kindness – Kindness, or brotherly love or love for one’s neighbor, is manifest in the unprejudiced, compassionate and charitable concern for others. Counters the sin of envy.

Diligence – Diligence, or persistence, in matters of the spiritual combat laziness. Counter to the sin of sloth (laziness in matters of faith).

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Pope John Paul II Address at World Youth Day, Rome, August 19th, 2000